

Cotton ball diet

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Abstract

A bezoar is a packed group of undigestible or partially digested material that often leads to gastrointestinal obstruction. Eating cotton balls to fill up the stomach and avoid hunger may seem harmless, but has serious implications.

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A bezoar is a group of undigestible or partially digested material that accumulates in the gastrointestinal tract¹. The intentional or accidental ingestion of different materials might cause a bezoar. The majority of the bezoars are located in the stomach but occasionally in the small intestine.

An unusual practice to lose weight is the ingestion of some material to replace food such as cotton balls, leading to loss of appetite and possible loss of weight².

A 29-year-old patient was admitted to the emergency room reporting abdominal distention for the last 24 hours. Also, she reported the intentional ingestion of several cotton balls 14 days later as part of a diet to lose weight. The patient reported a gastric bypass due to obesity seven years ago.

Abdominal computed-tomography revealed small intestinal distention with an intraluminal mass in the distal ileum (Figure 1).

An exploratory laparotomy was performed and several cotton balls were retrieved after enterotomy (Figure 2). The patient was discharged uneventfully three days later.

This case brings attention to the risk of some practices for losing weight. Also, the presence of a gastrojejunal anastomosis facilitates the passage of more extensive solid content compared to pylorus-preserving surgeries, leading to small bowel obstruction.

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